

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

GENERAL NOTES.

THE GENERIC NAMES *CERCOMYS* AND *PROECHIMYS*.

Mr. E. A. Goldman has recently* urged that the generic name *Proechimys* for the common Spiny Rats should be dropped in favor of *Cercomys*, given to his *Cercomys cunicularius* by F. Cuvier in 1829. This opinion is based on an identification—in which I entirely concur—of the skull and teeth described and figured as those of *Cercomys cunicularius*, with those of some member of what is usually called *Proechimys*.

But there is one point which has aroused suspicion, namely that a *Proechimys* young enough to have spineless pelage would have teeth in a very different state of wear from those of the figured skull, which is not only adult but old.† In *Proechimys* the pelage is always spinous before adult age is reached.

In searching for an animal with spineless fur to which the original figure of *Cercomys cunicularius* could be assigned I have naturally thought of *Thrichomys apereoides* Lund (*Nelomys antricola* Lund, of Winge) which occurs in Minas Geraes and agrees closely with the account and figure of *Cercomys*.

But the difficulty of the *Proechimys*-like skull and teeth still remaining I applied for help to the authorities in Paris, and Dr. Anthony has been good enough to send me the only skull which is there assigned to *Cercomys cunicularius*. To my great interest I find that it is a skull of *Thrichomys*, slightly immature, but is clearly not that figured by F. Cuvier as the skull of *Cercomys*.

The facts would therefore appear to be that the original *Cercomys cunicularius* had a skull of *Proechimys* wrongly assigned to it when it was first described in 1829, as may be gathered from the description of the teeth, and that this same skull served for F. Cuvier's description and figures in 1832. How and by whom the "*Thrichomys*" skull now before me, which was received as a "don du Musée de Genève," became identified as a *Cercomys* is not known, but I have no doubt that it is rightly so determined.

With regard to nomenclature it is clear that the animal and not the skull should be looked upon as the primary basis of the name *Cercomys*,

* Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., XXV, p. 94, 1912.

† I venture to differ entirely from Mr. Goldman as to the age of this skull, which he supposes to be young. The teeth present are worn down, and the last molar has been lost.

for the name itself is based on the rat-like tail, a full figure of the animal is given, and the erroneous description of the teeth only forms quite a subsidiary paragraph, to which typical importance could not be given. Moreover, were we to accept the wrongly allocated skull as the type, the species could never be satisfactorily determined, while the identification of the animal is now practically certain.

Mr. Goldman's own paper can not be accepted as giving him the authority of a "first reviser," for to have such authority a knowledge of all the pertinent facts is necessary, and Mr. Goldman was naturally unaware of the confusion about the skulls which has been indicated above.

As a result the now familiar name *Proechimys* will remain for the Spiny Rats, while *Cercomys* will be the proper generic name of the three species hitherto referred to *Thrichomys*—these being, therefore, *Cercomys cunicularius* F. Cuv. (1829) (*syn. Thrichomys apereoides* Lund, 1840), *C. fosteri* Thos. (1903) and *C. laurentius* Thos. (1904).

I may note in conclusion that the condition of the tail shown in the original figure of *Cercomys*, widely different as it is from that occurring in adult specimens of "*Thrichomys*," is not unlike what is found in immature specimens of that animal.

—Oldfield Thomas.

A CORRECTION OF TWO RECENT NAMES FOR MAMMALS.

In a report upon the mammals collected in Lower California during the "Albatross" Expedition of 1911 (Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist. XXXI, p. 122) Mr. C. H. Townsend describes two new subspecies of pocket mice as *Perognathus penicillatus goldmani* and *Perognathus spinatus nelsoni*. Unfortunately for the standing of these subspecific names both are already in current use as *Perognathus goldmani* (Osgood, N. Am. Fauna No. 18, p. 54, 1900) and *Perognathus nelsoni* Merriam (Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., 1894, p. 266). I would therefore propose to substitute the names *Perognathus penicillatus seri* for the first and *Perognathus spinatus occultus* for the second of these new subspecies.

—E. W. Nelson.

THE TECHNICAL NAME OF THE TASMANIAN DEVIL.

In 1903* I gave to the Tasmanian Devil the specific name of *satanicus* in substitution for that of *ursinus*, which, though in use since 1808, was technically inadmissible because of its earlier use for the Tasmanian Wombat.

Now, however, I find to my regret that another change is necessary owing to an overlooked name, given in a semi-popular work, having been in existence since 1842, and therefore long antedating *satanicus*.

This is:

Ursinus harrisii, Boitard, Jardin des Plantes, p. 290, 1842.

The generic name *Ursinus* is a synonym of *Sarcophilus* (1837), but the specific name would be valid, and the name of the Tasmanian Devil should therefore be *Sarcophilus harrisii* Boitard.

—Oldfield Thomas.

* Ann. Mag. N. H. (7), XI, p. 289, 1903.